Senators Agree to Soften Stand On 'Prior Notice' of CIA Activity

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In an effort to break an impasse with the Carter administration, leading members of the Senate Intelligence Committee have agreed to drop their demands for prior notice of all CIA covert operations.

The change was made in an effort to move an abbreviated legislative charter for the U.S. intelligence community to the Senate floor early next month. Congressional strategists fear that further dealy would make enactment this year impossible.

Sen. Walter D. Huddleston (D-Ky.), the chief Senate sponsor of the charter legislation, denied that the agreement on the prior-notice issue represented a "surrender" to the administration. He called it "a clarification" of "what we intended all along."

The bill will require the president to notify the House and Senate Intelligence Committees "in a timely fashion" whenever "'extraordinary circumstances" do not allow prior notice of covert operations.

In effect, Huddleston said, "we're trying to finesse the issue."

Huddleston and other senators had maintained that prior notice of all covert actions to at least some members of the Senate and House Intelligence committees was essential for adequate congressional oversight.

Huddleston said yesterday that neither he nor the other members of the Senate committee had ever wanted "to preclude the president's authority to act in extraordinary situations. This (new language) will make it explicit that he's got that prerogative."